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Viewing cable 09DHAHRAN8, SHI'A UNREST CONTINUES TO BUILD AFTER THE MEDINA INCIDENT

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09DHAHRAN8**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09DHAHRAN8	2009-03-02 16:22	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	** Dhahran

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/06/22/116306/wikileaks-saudi-crackdown-on-shiites.html>

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0008
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SUBJECT: SHI'A UNREST CONTINUES TO BUILD AFTER THE MEDINA INCIDENT

REF: 09 RIYADH 346, 09 RIYADH 270

CLASSIFIED BY: Joseph Kenny, Consul General, EXEC, DOS.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Key Points:

-- The Shi'a clashes with Saudi security forces in Medina in February have set off a wave of demonstrations, protests, and calls on the government for justice.

-- Members of the Shi'a communities from the Eastern Province were involved in the Baqi'a cemetery incident (ref A).

-- Several foreign Shi'a personalities from Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran have publicly condemned the alleged acts of the Saudi religious police and security forces in Medina.

-- Around 150 Shi'a leaders went to Riyadh to meet with the King to discuss the growing frustration among the Shi'a of Saudi Arabia. King Abdullah did not meet with them.

-- Several Shi'a leaders warned that tempers are rising in their communities and they are concerned that violence may break out.

12. (C) Comment:

-- The King's bold cabinet shakeup earlier this year left a sour taste with the Shi'a as their calls for more representation in the SAG went largely ignored. The incident in Medina that followed has only provoked an already restless population. Though post has not found any evidence that Iran or Hezbollah orchestrated or instigated the events at Baqi'a cemetery, they will almost certainly find a more welcoming audience as Saudi Shi'a frustrations mount. It is evident to post that the calm and cool heads of the Shi'a mainstream leadership are losing influence over their communities and are scrambling to maintain their credibility as legitimate and effective Shi'a representatives. Post agrees with many of our Shi'a interlocutors that a meeting between King Abdullah and a number of prominent Shi'a would go a long way to easing tensions.

13. (C) THE MEDINA SPARK... The clashes between Shi'a pilgrims and Saudi security forces in Medina that began February 20 (ref A) have enraged Shi'a communities across the Kingdom. Since the Medina incident, Shi'a leaders in the Eastern Province (EP) have been scrambling to calm their communities and call on the King to take action and address the discrimination against Shi'a in Saudi Arabia. The Sunni and Shi'a blogospheres have been more active than usual laying strong accusations against each other, some more credible than others. One contact from Qatif who was present in Medina at the time of the incident told PolOff how he witnessed the harassment and arrest of his teenage nephew by the religious police over his manner of prayer, highlighting the instigative and exaggerated behavior of the religious police towards the Shi'a in Medina.

14. (C) ...STARTS A FIRE IN THE EAST. Medina has captured the attention of the Shi'a across the Kingdom, especially in the large Shi'a communities in the EP. In the Shi'a oasis of Qatif and nearby Safwa, small groups of protesters totaling in the hundreds took to the streets on Friday, February 27, but were quickly dispersed by Saudi security forces. Several Shi'a contacts confirmed reports of gunfire by Saudi security forces in Qatif, though the shots were fired in the air in order to disperse the crowds. On Saturday, February 28 some Shi'a parents in Qatif and al-Ahsa did not send their children to school in protest of the Medina incident. Participation in this boycott was not widespread, but some sources said that at certain schools more than 70% of students were absent. A handful of smaller protests took place in the EP over the past couple of weeks and more calls for protests this week have been made on several blogs. Several residents of Qatif have told PolOff that since the Medina incident the presence of police and Saudi security forces has increased in the Shi'a towns of Qatif and Safwa.

15. (C) FOREIGN INFLUENCE. The Medina impact has even reached abroad with Lebanon's top Shi'a cleric, Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, calling on the SAG to punish the policemen accused of beating pilgrims. Similar condemnations have been made by Shi'a clerics in Iran and on an Iraqi website affiliated

with Muqtada al-Sadr. Several prominent Saudi Shi'a have dismissed suggestions of Iranian or Hezbollah influence or instigation at Baqi'a cemetery as "Wahabbi propaganda." However, they welcome the mounting international pressure and support from anywhere they can get it.

¶6. (C) PATIENCE IS RUNNING THIN. XXXXXXXXXXXXX(protect), an elected municipal council member and prominent Shi'a leadership figure, told PolOff that he and other Shi'a leaders are "trying to reduce tempers" in their respective communities. However, he warned that "the root for trouble is there" and that the potential for violence in Saudi could be worse than the "sectarian violence in Iraq." XXXXXXXXXXXXX (protect), a high-profile Saudi human rights activist, voiced his concerns that the Shi'a youth will resort to violence unless the SAG takes action. XXXXXXXXXXXXX (protect), a moderately influential Shi'a sheikh, told PolOff that if the Shi'a leadership does not meet with the King, then their followers will view them as having failed. All of the contacts were especially concerned with the stabbing of the Shi'a Sheikh Jawad al-Jaraadi by "Wahabbi extremists" in Medina and the fear of future sectarian attacks going unpunished. These warnings echo previous Dhahran reporting about increasingly frustrated and restless Shi'a youth (ref B).

¶7. (C) SHI'A LEADERS WANT TO MEET WITH THE KING. In an unprecedented move, about 150 Shi'a community leaders from Qatif, al-Ahsa, Medina and Najran went to Riyadh to request a meeting with King Abdullah. They went to discuss the deteriorating situation between the Shi'a and Sunni communities and communicate the urgency needed to quell rising tensions. According to several different high-level Shi'a sources in the EP, this delegation would have demanded the following deliverables: 1) the immediate release of all Shi'a arrested during the events in Medina, 2) a full and independent investigation into the incidents in Medina and justice for those who broke any laws, and 3) the appointment of Shi'a to ministerial positions and the Shura Council. However, sources said that King Abdullah denied a meeting on the evening of March 1 at which time the delegation departed Riyadh and returned to their respective communities. Shi'a leaders such as Sheikh Hassan al-Saffar continue to push to meet with the King.

¶8. (C) DIVIDED WE STAND. According to one source who was in Medina at the time, shortly after the incident at the Baqi'a cemetery, Sheikh Qadim of Medina led a delegation of Shi'a from al-Ahsa, Qatif, and Medina to meet with Prince Abdulaziz bin Majed bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the provincial governor of Medina. The source noted that this was a sign of the Shi'a uniting behind this case and believes that this intervention led to the release of some detainees. However, XXXXXXXXXXXXX told PolOff that in reality the Saudi Shi'a remain divided among regional factions and are pursuing competing agendas and interests. He noted that even the delegation that went to Riyadh did not speak with one voice, which he remarked is only helping the SAG in their efforts to "divide and conquer" the Shi'a.

KENNY